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ABSTRACT

Point Loma Nazarene College in San Diego, California, provides special academic support for its provisionally admitted students through its Program Quick Start, a collaborative, cross-disciplinary project involving the fields of literature and biology. The fully accredited college provides higher education in the liberal arts and preparation for service and leadership in selected professions for students who desire such an education in an environment of vital Christianity in the evangelical and Wesleyan tradition. Five to 10% of each incoming class is comprised of provisionally admitted students who do not satisfy admission requirements. Before this program, the college had little success in retaining these students. Based on a 2-year, small sample trial, the Dean of Liberal Arts at the college has learned that: (1) Program Quick Start seems to work; (2) interdisciplinary efforts are difficult to establish and maintain; (3) the importance of joint faculty-administrator efforts; (4) there were few models to follow; (5) the close tie between program development and finances; (6) many people expressed interest, concern, or reservations about the program; (7) the importance of marketing; and (8) the only way the program will survive is for it to be required of every provisionally admitted student. (RS)

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What the Institution Has Learned Thus Far

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Symposium Title
Collaboration Pays Off: An Advance Program for At-risk College Freshmen Teaches a Few lessons to Students, Faculty, and the Institution

National Reading Conference, San Diego
Area IX: Policy Issues
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What the Institution Has Learned

It is important that you have a snap-shot of Point Loma Nazarene College so that you can put the program we are describing in some context. I will attempt to provide that before my colleagues present their work. Following their presentations I will come back and describe what I have learned from our collaboration.

Point Loma Nazarene College is located on the Point Loma peninsula here in San Diego. It is one of the most beautiful campuses in this country with an ideal climate and ocean views from nearly every spot. PLNC is one of eight colleges sponsored by the Church of the Nazarene. It is classified as a comprehensive college by the Carnegie Commission and is fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. The college has approximately 2500 students enrolled in 18 departments with 126 full-time faculty. Adjunct faculty teach 22% of the course units. 92% of the enrolled units are in undergraduate programs with the remainder in graduate education and graduate religion. It is largely a residential campus with most students between 18 and 25 years of age.

The college is "driven" by a mission statement which not only impacts the curricular and co-curricular offerings but also impacts the admission standards. That statement claims that the college "provides higher education in the liberal arts and preparation for service and leadership in selected professions for students who desire such an education in an environment of vital Christianity in the evangelical and Wesleyan tradition." In relationship to admission standards, this mission has been played out by giving most applicants a chance at higher education. (87% of the 1994 applicants were admitted to the college.) Five to ten percent of each freshman class is filled with provisional students, students who do not satisfy the admission requirements. These students have high school grade point averages between 2.0 and 2.5.

There are several issues swirling around in the campus ethos at this time. One of these is the call for an increased emphasis on quality - the continued move to excellence. It is impossible to point to a single source of this emphasis but the fact that one of our sister Nazarene colleges half our size was singled out in the US News and World Report as one of the top ten colleges in their geographical region surely added fuel to the fire. Point Loma Nazarene College has been making significant strides toward excellence on several fronts: high quality students have been attracted by the offering of significant academic scholarships to every entering student with a high school GPA of at least 3.2, a steady increase in the number of full time faculty with terminal degrees, program review has been established which will require

every program to be examined by outside reviewers, higher admission standards have been adopted by the faculty, and there has been a tightening of the disqualification procedures for probationary students.

Several of these quality moves have enrollment implications and for a college that is largely tuition driven this can be serious. With a 15 to 1 student faculty ratio, if the enrollment increases 15 students there is funding for another faculty position. If enrollment, on the other hand, drops 45 students administrators begin looking for three faculty members to "voluntarily" leave the institution. The college has shown slow and steady growth for the last twenty years and there is little chance that there will be a voluntary downsizing. As a consequence, at least in the near future, it looks like provisionally admitted students are going to continue to be with us.

A study of our success with these "at-risk" students was done and the results were not encouraging. Approximately 33% of them drop out of college after the first semester and another 33% drop out before their fourth year.

PROVISIONAL STUDENT RETENTION DATA

Year	Number Accepted	Number Admitted	Retention 2nd Year	Retention 3rd Year	Retention 4th Year
1990		49	61%	47%	45%
1991	85	51	41%	20%	20%
1992	78	48	47%	35%	
1993	93	47	46%		
1994	75	47			

TABLE 1

In addition, the cumulative grade point average of these students is frequently so low they must take more than the minimum number of units to raise it to the required average for graduation.

The responsibility of providing special academic support for these provisionally admitted students had been addressed by the Learning Skills Center director but until the 1991-92 academic year little had been done by the faculty or the administration. If the acceptance of "at-risk" students is part of the mission of the institution then this "assessment data" suggests that the college is not doing a good job at helping these people succeed. Something must change.

Enter Phil Bowles and Darrel Falk.

END PART ONE

What The Institution Has Learned Thus Far

It is difficult to separate what the institution has learned from what I have learned. The fact of the matter is, I would be presumptions to claim what the institution has learned or that it has learned anything at all. My comments will center around what I have learned.

1. Program Quick Start works

Based on a two year, small sample, trial, Program Quick Start seems to work. That is, the retention of these "at-risk" students has increased and preliminary data indicates that their grade point average has improved. Darrel highlighted these results in his presentation. A lessor benefit is that students who cannot adjust either to the academic rigor or the social climate may leave with less trauma than leaving during the regular year might cause. Three students took this action during the first two summers.

2. Interdisciplinary efforts are difficult to establish and maintain.

I have spent 28 years of my professional life in institutions of higher education and have never been at a college where there was much team teaching or interdisciplinary work. I knew there were reasons for this but I have been slow in recognizing many of them.

Team-teaching is expensive. When faculty get together and request to jointly teach a course they usually both want full load credit for the class. The argument is that team teaching a course is as much work as if a single faculty member did the teaching. The course becomes twice as expensive. When suggestions are made to double the enrollment or split the load credit they are usually met with remarks like, "This is a liberal arts college. Students should be exposed to interdisciplinary efforts. If you don't believe enough in what we can do to pay us both then we won't team-teach the class." (I can make these comments because I have only been an academic administrator for five years. I remember making similar requests and remarks. I have also heard my colleagues make them.)

The fact that PQS was proposed and carried out as a summer offering allowed us to reduce the budgetary impact. Faculty at PLNC are not paid as much per course in the summer since there is no committee work and little or no advising, so the institution did not take as large a financial hit when both professors were paid for both classes.

It is particularly interesting to me to realize that the institution's emphasis on excellence has mitigated against interdisciplinary course offerings. As stronger and stronger

faculty are hired it becomes evident that they have stronger loyalties to their disciplines than to the college mission. The faculty choose to take on what I call "discipline ethos" rather than a "college ethos." This ardent loyalty to their discipline results in a suspicion of people who might teach or collaborate with others outside of their narrow area. C. P. Snow, in his monograph Two Cultures And the Scientific Revolution, made the following statement: "Nearly everyone will agree that our school education is too specialized, but nearly everyone feels that it is outside the will of man to alter it. All the lessons of our educational history suggest that we are only capable of increasing specialization, not decreasing it." We become so specialized that a journalism professor claims not to be able to teach a freshman composition class or a world history professor cannot teach a freshman American history course even though they had to pass a comprehensive in that field.

The faculty at PLNC required "proof" that PQS was helpful to the "at-risk" students. When initial attempts were made to alter the program or institutionalize it, the academic committees called for studies to document its success and efficiency -- studies which they have not required of established programs.

The last issue related to the difficulty of interdisciplinary efforts is that they are very faculty dependent. PQS was established by Darrel and Phil because THEY saw a need and THEY wanted to do something about it.. There has not been a ground swell to join them in this effort. As with most collaborative efforts, there is real danger that this program will die if either or both of these faculty members decide it is time to move on to other tasks.

3. The importance of joint faculty-administrator efforts.

It is very clear that this program would have little chance of succeeding if I had attempted to plan and develop it from the top down. It took two faculty members to see the need and do the planning and much of the selling to their peers. At the other end of the spectrum, I think the program would have had little chance of success if an administrator hadn't believed it was a good thing and supported it on the administrative level. The three of us have consoled and challenged each other. It has taken the team to get PQS this far.

4. There are few models to follow

I have been surprised at how few models I have been able to find to study and use as patterns. Many of the programs which have grown out of the First Year Experience work done at the University of South Carolina are conducted during the regular school year and are offered to all students. The program which I have found which closest matches PQS is the Challenge program at Georgia Institute of Technology. This program is a rigorous five-week summer school regime for African-American and Hispanic

students. The program is described as "a ramrod introductory curriculum of math and chemistry taught by the same professors these students will encounter during their freshman year." The program has been so successful that Georgia Tech has adopted a two week version of it for all 1,600 incoming freshmen.

Another program which has been experiencing success is located at Indiana University in Bloomington. Their program titled "Groups" invites first-generation, under-represented, and disabled students to campus for a summer academic program. Unless these students participate in the program they will not be admitted to the University.

I wonder if the reason for the dearth of such programs is that colleges are so intent in improving their reputations and standings in surveys such as that in the US News and World Report that they are interested more in raising input standards than in assisting those who might succeed with some special help. It is true that we are evaluated and ranked according to the quality of student we admit and the number we exclude rather than on the academic growth of those who actually do enter our campuses. The role of budgets must also be considered. It could be argued that there just is not enough budget to offer everyone a chance at higher education. Possibly, colleges and universities see the task of educating these "at-risk" students as the role of the community college.

5. The close tie between program development and finances

For a tuition driven institution there is great joy if a program is developed which will increase enrollment. A recent issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education mentioned several colleges that had re-instituted football to increase the number of students, particularly male students, in the student body. There is not the same kind of joy when programs are developed which may decrease the enrollment, even if they have some other positive impact. Enrollment officers do not like to have faculty and administrators "un-do" their work. We are to make it easier for them to fill the classes, not more difficult.

It has also become clear that faculty do not understand this close tie between programs and finances. At PLNC there is the call to ratchet up the quality on several fronts without realizing the impact on enrollment and consequently on employment. While it is clear that more students means more faculty, it is not nearly so obvious that fewer students may mean fewer faculty. Even when this is understood, the cut must take place in some other department. Not mine.

6. The number of people vested in a new program

I didn't realize how many people on campus would express interest - concern - reservation about an endeavor such as Program Quick Start. The list includes, The Office of Enrollment Management,

the Financial Aid Office, the Admissions Office, the Admissions and Retention Committee, food services, the Office of Student Development, the Office of Residential Life, the Office of Academic Advising, the Academic Policy Committee, and the First Year Experience Committee. Each of these individuals or groups has something to say about the program. Each wants to have input as to its methods, procedures, and policies. To have the program adopted on an experimental basis, and now to attempt to institutionalize it, has taken, and continues to take, more political insight, power, baby kissing, and hand holding than I ever expected.

7. The importance of marketing

It has been said that if you build a better mouse trap people will buy it. That may be true about mouse traps but it is certainly not true about educational endeavors. Today students and parents select colleges frequently on where they can get the best deal financially. Program Quick Start has been shown to be a help for "at-risk" students but getting them to come has proven to be very difficult. There are many reasons including: the cost ($3,000), the stigma of beginning school five weeks early, and the sacrifice of five weeks of work (or surfing). A program such as this is a "hard sell". This leads to my final observation.

8. It must be required

I have concluded that the only way this program will survive is for it to be required of every provisionally admitted student before they enter a regular semester. And, I want this program to survive! Not just because I have been a part of its planning and development, but because I believe it is the right thing to do. If the Point Loma Nazarene College mission statement supports the inclusion of these students on our campus then we have an ethical obligation to help them succeed. Our assessment efforts show that we are not succeeding with very many of them. Program Quick Start is a modification of those efforts which the three of us believe will work.